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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001028

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SUBJECT: CHAT WITH SELF PROCLAIMED COORDINATOR OF A NEW PARTY

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Geeta Pasi; Reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) Summary. Poloff met with purported king's party leader Dr. Ferdaus Quarishi. Quarishi referred to himself as the coordinator for a movement that is filling a political vacuum with honest and seasoned politicians. He plans to draft a party constitution within three months and hold a party convention by December 2007. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On June 2, media reported that former BNP Joint Secretary General Dr. Ferdaus Ahmed Quarishi announced the

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formation of a new, as-of-yet unnamed political party. In a two-hour kick-off meeting attended by members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Awami League, and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Quarishi said that "we have started to float a new political party in keeping with the spirit of January 11." Mainstream politicians and political analysts knew little or nothing about Quarishi. However, Quarishi was well known to the local VOA correspondent as well as a number of reporters. On June 19, poloff met with Quarishi and two other politicians, former MP Kazi Feroz Rashid and Advocate Razlur Rahman at the newspaper offices of "Daily Deshbangla" where Quarishi works.

13. (C) Quarishi downplayed the notion that he was the party's leader, referring to himself as a coordinator whose main task is to organize a national party convention. He dismissed any ties to the army as unfounded "allegations" and said that his movement is simply filling "a political vacuum" created by the collapse of the two major political parties. As for reports that DGFI's General Fazlul Bari was involved in the formation of Quarishi's movement, Quarishi said that "General Bari is a key figure in the government, so it is his duty to advance politics and steer people towards a good election. Naturally, he has to go out and meet politicians."

14. (C) Quarishi said that he and others are angry about the "unbelievable reports of corruption." "People," he said, "from all over Bangladesh have been calling to join this movement. All of them believe and hope for a better Bangladesh."

15. (C) Quarishi appeared amused by notions that he is new to politics. He said that he had been in politics since 1965 when he was the President of the East Pakistan Student League. As a supporter of Zia Rahman, he was Senior Joint Secretary General of the BNP from 1980 to 1985. He left for

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London in 1985 where he received a doctorate in Systems Science from City University. He returned to Bangladesh in 1990 and contested as a BNP candidate in the 1996 parliamentary elections but was defeated by "money and muscle." He said he has been working in journalism since then and is the leader of his own political party, the Green party.

16. (C) Quarishi said he is the coordinator of a political movement composed of people who have been "humiliated and ignored" by the current political leadership. By the end of the year, he hoped to find 300 candidates who are already popular in their constituencies, have a good track record, and clean financial records. "Currently, we have meetings with 15 people at a time, and gradually want to expand our numbers to 100 people per meeting once the ban on indoor politics is lifted," he said. Within three months, he said, we should have a constitution drafted in time for a December convention with 30,000 people representing all 300 constituencies.

17. (C) Asked if the government supported him, Quarishi said, "The government doesn't sponsor us but is friendly towards us and hopes that we would do some good. We all know they need a safe landing." As for financial support, he said that politics has become expensive with parties hiring supporters and demonstrators. "Real politics is not expensive. Our people will have to pay their own way. Back when we were students, we paid for our dreams ourselves."

18. (C) Quarishi said that his movement would take anyone, but no senior members of the other parties have approached him, nor have any sitting army officers. "General Moeen would have to resign first were he to enter politics," he said. Quarishi discounted any direct army involvement in his movement. "The army is not going to get involved in politics. They have other obligations."

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